10

THE WESTERN HIMALAYAN STATES*

A. H. Dani

Contents

The western Himalayan states, better described as the trans-Himalayan states,[1] lie practically south of the ranges of Chinese Turkistan. Sandwiched between high ranges, the entire region is unaffected by the monsoon climate and protected from northern blizzards. Although the Indus river runs across it, this does not make for the unity of the region. The river is too deep and rocky for navigation and its banks are too high and sloping for normal habitation. The hill ranges subdivide the region into smaller river valleys, with the human population organized into smaller communities and forming separate cultural units. Each of them also developed petty states in the course of history; hence we talk in terms of Himalayan states and not of one state. They all lie in the western Himalayan zone to the south-west of Tibet.[2]

* See Map 7.
[1] See Dani, 1989*a*, Ch. 1, for details.
[2] Maqbul Ahmad and Raja Bano, 1984, pp. 194–7.

There is no one historical name for the entire region. Leitner coined the term 'Dardistan' in the nineteenth century, since the languages spoken in the different valleys have all been grouped under the Dardic family – with the exception of Balti, spoken in Baltistan, which is affiliated to Tibetan. Jettmar[3] has argued for 'Bolor', a term known to Arabic scholars and also to the Chinese of the medieval period. But its exact connotation is not clear, nor is it comprehensive enough to embrace the whole region. During British rule, two terms, 'Gilgit' and 'Baltistan', were applied to two political divisions, and 'Chitral' was placed under the Malakand Political Agency. The Government of Pakistan refers officially to the region as the Northern Areas, but that excludes Chitral, which is now a district of the North-West Frontier Province.

The medieval history of the region begins with the emergence of the Turkish ruling families, whose dates are not certain.[4] However, they appear to have replaced the ancient dynasty of the Patola Shāhīs in Gilgit some time in the middle of the eighth century. At this time, several historical events may be noted in the region. The Tibetans are known to have advanced into Gilgit via Baltistan. To counter them, a Chinese general of Korean origin, Kao-Hsien, marched with his army into the region in 743. He restored the rule of the Patola Shāhīs, but how long thereafter the Shāhīs ruled is not certain. According to the anonymous author of the *Hudūd al-ᶜālam* [The Limits of the World], the king Balurin Shāh regarded himself as the son of the sun god. Al-Bīrūni calls them Bhatta Shāh and refers to them as Turkic tribes.[5] An Arabic inscription attributed to the time of the ᶜAbbasid caliph al-Ma'mūn (813–33) speaks of a victory over the rulers of Wakhan and Bolor.[6] These items of information do not clarify the issue of the origin of the Turkic tribes, but they certainly speak of the change of dynasty that must have taken place long before the time of al-Bīrūnī.

The Trakhān dynasty of Gilgit

According to traditional history,[7] the main ruling dynasty in Gilgit is known as the Trakhāns. It is from this dynasty that the rulers of Nager and Hunza derive their origin. Similarly, the rulers of Yasin, Punial and Chitral had close connections with them. It is only the history of Baltistan which had its separate role to play, although that also had links with Gilgit on several occasions. Tradition traces the origin of the Trakhāns to an imaginary Kayāni prince of Persia, by name Āzur Jamshīd, who is said to have fled here after the Arab

[3] Jettmar, 1979, pp. 39–70.
[4] Dani, 1987, Introduction.
[5] Sachau, 1910, Vol. 1, pp. 207–8.
[6] Ghafoor, 1965, pp. 4–12.
[7] See Dani, 1987.

conquest of Persia and secretly married Nūr Bakht Khātūn, the daughter of the Buddhist king Śrī Badat. A son was born, who was named Kark or Garg. Although Āzur Jamshīd is credited with having overthrown Śri Badat and succeeded to his throne, he chose to abdicate sixteen years later, after handing over the throne to his queen, who ruled until her son grew up. The son, Kark, held power for fifty-five years and was succeeded by Rajah Sau Malik.

There was a quick succession of rulers after this event. Rajah Sau Malik was succeeded by his son Rajah Shāh Malik, also known as Glit Kalika (or Malik), i.e. Malik of Gilgit, followed by Glit Kalika's son Deng Malik, and finally the latter's son Khusraw Khan. The rule of this last king is said to have ended in 997, a date that may be accepted. Khusraw Khan married a princess from Badakhshan and the presence of a Badakhshānī princess must have led to some social changes in the Gilgit ruling family. It is important to note that this Turkic family came from the north; thus there was a strong northern influence in the royal house of Gilgit by the end of the tenth century.

Rajah Khusraw Khan's son, Rajah Haydar Khan, succeeded to the throne in 997. His cousin, Shāh Hatam (or Shāh Tham), governed the Nager and Hunza valleys. Shāh Tham tried to assert his independence, but being pressed by Haydar's forces he fled to Baltistan via the Hispar glacier. Rajah Haydar Khan was succeeded in 1057 by his son Nūr Khan, who spent his time in religious devotion and entrusted the work of administration to his ministers. In 1127 he abdicated in favour of his son Shāh Mirza, who died in 1205, leaving the throne to his son Tartora Khan, who had two queens. The first, called Shāh Begam, was of the royal family and gave birth to Torrā Khan, but the second queen, a commoner from the Darel valley, proved to be jealous and cunning. She managed to poison the king and snatch the throne for herself in 1236, but ruled only for five years. All her attempts to kill her stepson Torrā Khan were foiled by a minister hailing from the Hodur valley. She met her death and was succeeded in 1241 by Rajah Torrā Khan, who is supposed to have started the dynastic name Trakhān. Before this ruler the dynasty was known as the Kayānīs.

Rajah Torrā Khan's reign (1241–75) was marked by great events. His own stepbrother, Shāh Ra'īs Khan, born of the Dareli queen, fled from Gilgit and took shelter with the king of Badakhshan, whose name is given as Tāj Mughal, perhaps to be corrected as Tājdār-i Mughal, who is said to have been a follower of the Isma^{c}ili Shi^{c}ite sect. The Badakhshan ruler invaded Gilgit, snatched Chitral from Torrā Khān and placed Shāh Ra'īs Khan on Chitral's throne. This was the beginning of the Ra'īsiyya dynasty there. According to tradition, Isma^{c}ilism was introduced into the Gilgit region by Tāj Mughal, but this lacks confirmation. In any event, the ruler of Gilgit is said to have abandoned Isma^{c}ilism. As a result, there was a second invasion, but Gilgit forces defended their territory steadfastly. In the

course of this campaign, Rajah Torrā Khan died; he was succeeded by his son, Sau Malik II (1275–1345).

The Mongol invasion of Gilgit appears to be related to two invasions of Kashmir, the first by Dulcha (or Zulchu) in *c*. 1319 and the second by Urdul (or Achal) in 1326.[8] As a result of these invasions, there was a dynastic change also in Kashmir and we note there the foundation of an independent Muslim sultanate by Shāh Mir. Seen in this perspective, this interrelation of events brings the histories of Gilgit and Kashmir together and confirms that Sau Malik II and Shāh Mir were contemporaries. From this time on, there was a close relationship between the rulers of Gilgit and those of Kashmir. Sau Malik II was succeeded by his son Chilis Khan (1345–59). He also enjoyed good relations with Kashmir and encouraged commerce with the neighbouring countries of Badakhshan, Transoxania, Kashmir and Afghanistan. He married Malika Hāshim Begam, a daughter of Shāh Ra'īs Khan of Chitral. His own daughter was later married to Shāhzada Shāh Khan, a grandson of Shāh Ra'īs Khan. Chilis Khan was succeeded by Rajah Firdaws Khan, who ruled until 1397. He brought large numbers of artisans and craftsmen from Kashmir and built the Qil^{c}a-yi Firdawsiyya in Gilgit. Firdaws was succeeded by Khusraw Khan II, who ruled until 1422. He added a tower to his father's fort at Gilgit, which was known as Khusraw Khan-i Shikar.

Khusraw Khan II had two sons, Rajah Malik Shāh and Dula Shāh. While the first ruled from 1422 to 1449, the second became his commander-in-chief. The latter had a handsome son, called Lili Gashpur, who married the king's daughter. According to tradition, they had twin sons whose backs were joined together at birth. When they grew up, they became bitter rivals. One of them called Jamshid, also known as Maglot, obtained Nager as his possession, while the second (called Sāhib Khan alias Girkis) received Hunza.[9] This is the mythical story of the creation of the Nager and Hunza states.

The next ruler of Gilgit, Torrā Khan II (1449–79), son of Rajah Malik Shāh, was a man of great consequence. He continued good relations with Kashmir and was so fond of Kashmiri arts and crafts that he invited a group of Kashmiri craftsmen to settle in Gilgit in Mohalla Kishrot. He was followed by a quick succession of rulers, the most important of whom, Shāh Ra'īs A^{c}zam, ruled until 1561.

[8] Hasan, 1959, pp. 34–7; Sufi, 1949, Vol. 1, pp. 117–18, 128–9; Parmu, 1967, pp. 82–4.
[9] For details, see Dani, 1989*a*, pp. 170–4.

The Maglot ruling family of Nager

The ruling family derived its name from Maglot, a nickname of Prince Jamshid, ruler of the Nager valley and founder of a royal house from about 1440. At first the Maglot rulers built a fortified village, called Muko-Kot or Nager Khan, where they lived until 1894, when it was destroyed by the Nager river. There was a perpetual struggle between the rulers of Nager and Hunza until Shāh Kamal came to the throne in 1559 and began a line which in general had peaceable relations with the rulers of Gilgit.

The Ayash ruling family of Hunza

The origin of the Hunza royal house has been traced to the earlier Girkis. This state, being close to Wakhan and Xinjiang, had many historical links with them. As Hunza was always at war with Nager, their mutual struggle constantly affected the royal house. The succession to Girkis is variously given in different traditions. Finally, Ayasho (alias Shāh Khan) was brought from Wakhan and placed on the throne. He was succeeded by Silum (or Salim) Khan. Another account gives Mayhuritham as the next ruler. Mayhuritham fled to Wakhan and gave his daughter in marriage to the ruler of Wakhan. A son born to them bore the name of Ayasho II and was crowned in Hunza; he married a Skardu princess, a daughter of ᶜAbd al-Khān. Ayasho II also sent artisans from Baltistan, who built the palatial forts of Baltit and Altit in Hunza; the tower of the Altit fort gives the date 955/1548. The local historian Qudrat Allāh Beg accordingly states that, after this marriage of Ayasho II, contacts between Hunza and Baltistan increased.

The Kator royal family of Chitral

We have earlier seen how Shāh Ra'īs Khan became the ruler of Chitral and founded the Ra'īsiyya dynasty. This dynasty continued to rule in Chitral for nearly 300 years. According to the unpublished manuscript, the *Shāhnāma-i Chitral*, this dynasty came to an end in the sixteenth century and was succeeded by that of Sangin ᶜAlī. His grandson, Shāh Kator I, founded the Kator dynasty in Chitral in 1585 by usurping power from the Ra'īsiyya family.

Baltistan

Baltistan spreads upwards from the Indus river and is separated from Ladakh by the Siachen glacier. The river makes a great lake around the city of Skardu, the headquarters of Baltistan

district. Three ruling families were important: the Makpons of Skardu, the Amāchas of Shigar and the Yabghus of Khaplu.

THE MAKPONS OF SKARDU

Francke has related the history of the Tibeto-Dard kingdom (500–1000).[10] The involvement of the Tibetans in this region must have followed the consolidation of the dynastic rule in Tibet by its founder, Songtsen-gampo (d. 649 or 650). We have distinct evidence of Tibetan inscriptions and the existence of the Tibetan form of Tantric Buddhism all over Baltistan. Only towards the end of the ninth century or at the beginning of the tenth, after the dissolution of this dynastic power, could a new power arise in Baltistan. It was linked with the implantation there of a new ethnic element. Two factors are important here: first, the expansion of the Uighur Türks in Xinjiang and their interest in controlling the trade across the Karakorum pass towards India; and second, the establishment of Turkish authority in Gilgit, Hunza and Nager. The local traditions speak of an immigrant from Kashmir, who, after marrying a local princess, started the line of Makpon rulers of Skardu.[11] Seven generations of rulers followed the founder of the dynasty in Skardu. This ruler was followed in turn by Khokhar Singa, then Ghotachon Singe, next Bahrām Shāh and finally Makpon Bokha, whose date of accession to power is given as *c.* 1500. He is credited with having been the real founder of the state power of Skardu and he in fact founded the city of Skardu, so-named because it means ‘low land between high places’, those of Shikri and Satpara. His residential seat was at Kharpocha fort, towering high above the surrounding plain. He is also known to have provided a new socio-economic base for the district by importing people and craftsmen from Chilas and Kashmir.

THE AMĀCHAS OF SHIGAR

Shāh Tham came to Shigar from Hunza and accepted service with the last local ruler, Mashido. It is quite possible that he was his minister, i.e. *amātya* (a word of Sanskrit origin), from which the family title Amācha is possibly derived, although others take the title to be of Chinese origin.[12] Ten generations separate Shāh Tham and Gorī Tham. It was in the time of this last ruler that Sayyid ᶜAlī Hamadāni came to Shigar, converted the local ruler, spread Islam and built the Ambariq mosque. Gorī Tham was followed by Ghāzī Tham, then ᶜAlī Mir and then Ghāzī, who ruled from 1490 to 1520. He was a contemporary of Makpon Bokha of Skardu and it was during his time that the famous Sufi, Shams al-Din

[10] Francke, 1907, Chs 3, 5.
[11] Vigne, 1842, Vol. 1, p. 251; Biddulph, 1977, p. 144.
[12] See Thomas, 1935, Vol. 2, p. 191.

ᶜIrāqi, came to Shigar; he died there in 1525. Subsequent rulers became subject, in the seventeenth century, to the Mughal emperors in Delhi.

THE YABGHU RULERS OF KHAPLU

The very title Yabghu suggests a Turkish origin for the rulers of Khaplu. Tradition gives the history of these rulers as starting with Bag Nanthal in *c.* 850 and continuing with a list of nineteen rulers up to Aᶜzam Khan Shah. In the fifteenth century an invasion of Baltistan by the Timurid Abū Saᶜīd Sultan is mentioned.

Relations with Tibet, Kashgharia and the trans-Pamir regions

It was after the expulsion of the Tibetan forces from Gilgit and Baltistan that the new states of the medieval period came into existence. Thereafter, the Gilgit region was almost cut off from Tibet, but the Baltistan states were in close contact with Ladakh, which was then a close ally of Tibet. The rulers of Skardu and Khaplu waged many wars against those of Ladakh. The state of Hunza and the Baltistan states were likewise in direct contact with Kashgharia. In the earlier history of Hunza, the Hunza princes went to Yarkand and obtained territorial rights in the Raskam area. The most important event, however, was the invasion of the Timurid Abū Saᶜīd Sultan into several parts of Baltistan, particularly Khaplu and Shigar, and the imposing of his temporary suzerainty. It was probably threats from the north that later persuaded the Mughal emperors of Delhi to advance into Kashmir and still later into Baltistan and Ladakh. But the most important relationship of the local rulers was that established with the royal family of Badakhshan.

Relations with Kashmir

In the medieval period, there was no warfare between Kashmir and the states of this region, although some of the local rulers on occasion fled to Kashmir, and with military help from there, were able to reconquer their former kingdoms. On the other hand, right from the beginning there were numerous cultural and commercial relations with Kashmir. We have seen earlier how the rulers of Gilgit and Baltistan imported artisans and craftsmen from Kashmir and settled them there, and these introduced the Kashmiri style of architecture and also brought in decorative elements to ornament the wooden mosques and tombs. Of great cultural and religious importance was the advent of the Sufi Shaykh Sayyid ᶜAlī

Hamadāni and his disciples through Kashmir into Baltistan, thereby injecting a new element of mysticism into the religious life of the local people.

Long-term socio-economic developments

All the ruling families from Chitral to Gilgit, Hunza, Khaplu and Skardu were of Turkic ethnic origin, although they came to speak the languages of the regions where they settled. These Turkic tribes migrated here soon after the Arab conquest of Central Asia in the eighth to the ninth century, retaining at this time their shamanist and Buddhist beliefs; only later were they converted to Islam in this very region. However, the local population is not ethnically Turkic, nor does it have any ethnic relationship with the Chinese. Except for the Balti-pa, i.e. those who speak the Balti language in Baltistan and Burushaski, they all belong to the Indo-Aryan group as far as their languages are concerned. In this wide group, the particular sub-branch has been termed Dardic. This penetration of Indo-Aryan tribes into the far-flung region of western trans-Himalaya has kept Chinese political and cultural influence out of this region. Moreover, the Aryan character of the land has been further shielded by the Turkic peoples of the neighbouring Xinjiang province of western China. It is likely that the relationship with these Turkic tribes has been a factor in the cultural connections of the population of this part of these areas and Xinjiang; this may explain the acceptance of Turkish royal families as rulers.

Apart from the ethnic penetration from the north, however, there is a deeper linkage with the Buddhist and Hindu south as far as cultural and religious aspects are concerned. Yet this cultural penetration did not establish close, friendly relations with Kashmir, probably because of political rivalries. Linguistic, palaeographic and even socio-cultural differences can be traced to this one main factor. On the other hand, a connection with Taxila and Gandhara and even with the Indo-Gangetic plains is more firmly based. In spite of these discrepancies, the influence of Sayyid ᶜAlī Hamadāni and his disciples from Kashmir became an enduring feature in the Islamic penetration of the region. Yet we find northern influences imperceptibly breaking the cultural unity, and it is this peculiar feature that explains the distribution pattern of Muslim sects in the northern areas of modern Pakistan.

At present, three distinct socio-political patterns are easily recognizable. Starting from the west, we first meet with the so-called ‘republican’ tribes localized in the valleys of Tanigr, Darel and Chilas. These may be extended still further south-west on either side of the Indus river, which, in British times, was referred to as Yaghistan (Land of Rebellion, i.e. no-man’s-land), but is today included in Kohistan district. This is the hard-core area of the orthodox Sunni Muslims. Some early epigraphic evidence reveals the existence of

small kingdoms here, but at some point in the medieval period these kingdoms disappeared and the different tribes established their own tribal system of political management, which the British Indian records characterized as 'republican'. These political units had no kings, but tribal elders negotiated political relations with superior military powers. Local defence was organized by able-bodied young men hailing from various families. When these tribes moved into Gilgit, however, they accepted the authority of the local *rājā*. It appears that the *rājās* of Gilgit, Yasin and even Chitral raided into this territory, and, depending on their might, exercised control over the area. It was probably under these circumstances that these tribes moved into Gilgit. At a later period the British encouraged the migration of Pashtun tribes from the direction of Swat into the no-man's-land in order to create a manageable political force in that area. It was probably as a result of this Pashtun penetration that *the jirga* system of tribal assemblies became widespread in this sub-region. Even the ruler of Swat advanced right up to Kandia valley with his soldiers, and finally the western part of the Indus river fell under his control. However, the social system of the indigenous local tribes is fundamentally different from that of the Pashtuns.

The second important sub-area contains the Burushaski-speaking population in Hunza. (There is also the Wakhi-speaking population, who migrated from across the Pamirs at a much later date.) The Burushaski-speaking population had a much wider distribution in the past but, according to the latest research, they have been pushed into their present home by the Shina-speaking population. The Burushaski population is fundamentally different in behaviour patterns, attitudes, traditional customs, and even in social categorization, from the population in Gilgit, Chilas and other western areas. Burushaski society is freer. The women have greater mobility and better social standing and status; they move freely in society and share equal responsibility with the men. The ruling families and their associated élites have established a political authority, but the gulf between this upper structure and the mass of the Burushaski population is easily recognizable to anyone who lives in this society and notes the great influence exercised by the local population on the ruling élite. The difference between the Hunzakuts on the one hand, and the Gilgit and Chilas on the other, was so great that early British Indian writers applied the term 'Yashkum' to the Hunzakuts and 'Shin' to the western tribes, although these two terms have nothing to do with ethnic groups; they have, rather, socio-economic and feudal connotations. It is this Burushaski-speaking population who are now Isma^{c}ilis.

The third important sub-area is Baltistan, which is a melting-pot of influences from Tibet, Ladakh, Kashmir and even beyond from the further Indian side. The Tibetan and Ladakhi influence is largely seen in the local language, geographic names, physical types and probably also in the social behaviour patterns. As it is open to Kashghar through the

Soltoro and Karakorum passes, the northern influence is no less important. Its relationship with Kashmir, however, is known to date back to the Mughal period. Nevertheless, the ruling families have had a blood relationship with those of Hunza because the Hispar glacier on the north permits a direct route from Shigir to Nager and Hunza. With all these geographic features and political connections, it is mainly Kashmir and Kashghar that have left an indelible influence as far as Islam is concerned. That is probably because Baltistan lies midway on the direct route between Kashmir and Kashghar. Although as a result of Kashmir's influence Islam arrived here quite early, it is probably the Kashghar channel that introduced both Shi^{c}ism and the Nūrbakhshī Sufi order, the two dominant religious currents that now exist. It would be interesting to discover how much of the Tibetan social system is still current among the original population of this sub-area. But the ruling élite, which extended its political authority here, made many compromises with the local population.

The three divisions given above show the socio-cultural cleavage between the Shina-speaking people and the Burushaski-speaking people; at the same time, these two differ from the Baltis in physical type as well as in various aspects of cultural life. In social classification, apart from the professional groups, the two dominant classes are those of Shins and Yashkuns, who exhibit a deep-seated rivalry and hatred for each other. The origin of this hostility is not known, but it appears to be rooted in some kind of landowning overlordship, a system that has survived from the pre-Muslim period. These two categories are not much known in Baltistan. As against them, there is the class known as *doms*, who are low-class immigrants from Kashmir.

As the traditional economy depended primarily on agriculture and pastoralism, the two systems are unevenly distributed in the different valleys. River irrigation is not much developed since it is difficult in a hilly country. Instead, melted glacier water is distributed and channelled from great heights to the lowest-level fields, which range in terraces from top to bottom. The amount of such cultivable land is very limited, hence there have been constant wars among tribes for the possession of land. Ownership is common rather than individual, but within the common lands, individuals have their own rights and privileges. It is these rights that are disputed by Shins and Yashkuns. However, common ownership is limited within a particular valley. It is this system that has led to perpetual rivalry and wars; the enmity between Nager and Hunza is proverbial. Similarly the Chilasis, Gilgitis and people of Yasin have traditionally been bitter rivals.

Socio-religious developments

At present, the entire population of the Northern Areas is Muslim, but Islam did not spread here all at one time and from one direction. Islamization was a gradual process, and as a result of the influences from the neighbouring areas of north, south and west, the nature of Islamic beliefs and practices differs from one sub-region to another. These practices are themselves greatly influenced by surviving cultural rituals and behaviour patterns inherited from the past. Thus we may note the legacy of pre-history in the form of rock art that has continued up to the present day; in the beliefs in fairies and their hold in the minds of the local people; in the reverence paid to the standing rocks, monoliths and high mountains, including the devastating effect of the glaciers; in the animal sacrifices, ceremonies and dances that are quite distinct from the Islamic ᶜĪd-i Qurbān; in the manner in which graves and tombs are built, and the dead interred there; and in the local dress, ornaments, forms of pots and pans, and many household objects that are firmly interwoven into the pattern of a socio-economic life that is rooted in the horticultural and pastoral productive system of the region. Each one of these aspects deserves a special study, as they have continued to characterize socio-cultural practices differently in the different sub-regions.

Today, the Muslims of the region are either Sunni, Ismaᶜili, Twelver Shiᶜite or adherents of the Nūrbakhshī Sufi order. There is no definite information on the advent of Ismaᶜilism before *c.* 1830. However, the disciples of Sayyid ᶜAlī Hamadānī reached the region in late medieval times. Credit must go to Shams al-Dīn ᶜIrāqī and his family members, now lying buried in Skardu, Shigir and Kiris in Baltistan, for their continued missionary activity in this area. Although it is disputed whether Shams al-Dīn was a Nūrbakhshī adherent or a Shiᶜite, his connection with Kashmir is well established. There is another family of missionaries – Mawlānā Sayyid Mahmūd Shāh Tūsī and his brother, Mir Sayyid ᶜAlī Tūsī, now buried at Skardu and Kuwardu respectively – who are known to have come from Persia through Yarkand in the sixteenth century and are mainly responsible for the spread of Shiᶜism. It is from Baltistan that five preachers – Sayyid Sultan ᶜAlī ᶜĀrif, Sayyid Shāh Wall, Sayyid Shāh Afdal, Sayyid Akbar Shāh and Sayyid Shāh Ibrāhim – are known to have travelled towards Gilgit and spread Shiᶜism there; their tombs are found at Gilgit, Danyor and Gulmit.